



Defending Water is Defending Land and Life

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Table of contents

Our Viewpoint - Water and Land: Inseparable Threads of Life.....	2
Quilombola Communities Recover Land and Water After 40 Years of Eucalyptus Monoculture in Brazil.....	4
Oil Palm Plantations and Water Grabbing: Ivory Coast and Gabon.....	11
Peru: Against Oil’s Devastation of Territories and Indigenous Rights, The Way of the Rivers.....	12
Struggling to Stay Afloat: The People of Pari Island, Indonesia, Against Injustice.....	18
“Without Water There is No Life”: The Rivers of the Bolivian Amazon.....	22
From Asia to Africa: Tentacles of Oil Palm Plantations are Squeezing Communities Dry.....	26
Water, Extractivism and Critical Minerals in Brazil: Some Reflections.....	30
RECOMMENDED.....	34
Water Justice Roundtables in South Africa.....	34
Women and Water Justice Struggles in Africa.....	34
Industrial Agribusinesses are Drying Out African Lands.....	34
Colombian palm oil company under investigation for polluting rivers.....	34

This Bulletin articles are written by the following organizations and individuals:

Two quilombola activists from Sapê do Norte, in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil; villagers from the Yaproko community in Ivory Coast and from four villages in Gabon; the Amazonian Indigenous Peoples United in Defense of their Territories platform (PUINAMUDT) in Peru; a filmmaker from France-Bolivia; GRAIN and KRuHA, Indonesia; an associate Professor at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Brazil, and members of the WRM International Secretariat.

OUR VIEWPOINT

Water and Land: Inseparable Threads of Life

Behind each land grabbing there is also water grabbing. Land and water are interlinked and inseparable, and water, in this sense, is an essential aspect of land and life. It flows, transforms, nourishes and is being nourished by other living cycles. Water is thus an essential part of communities' struggles.

Along its chain of extraction, production and distribution, each 'commodity' hides many stories of dispossession and destruction. From minerals to oil, from rubber to palm oil, from pulpwood to carton, and nowadays, even carbon, water and biodiversity offset credits are tied to violence and dispossession. They all are connected with land grabbed from communities, and often also pollution of land, water and air. Land, particularly for forest-dependent and peasant communities, encompasses much more than what the common eye can see. Grabbing their land and the water that sustains that land means also grabbing their memories, stories, roots and connections. Land and water are interlinked and inseparable, and water, in this sense, is an essential aspect of land and life. It flows, transforms, nourishes and is being nourished by other living cycles. Water is thus an essential part of communities' struggles.

The consequences of poisoning and/or looting of water are felt by the abundant life systems that depend on the many water sources and the territories that they sustain. Extractive operations, production sites and transportation corridors therefore affect much larger areas than the territories occupied by these polluting activities themselves. Their impact on life and communities thus reaches far beyond the sites of operation, production and transport.

These devastating impacts are very deep in their own right, as Tom Goldtooth from the Indigenous Environmental Network points out, referring to the impacts of forest-based carbon offset projects called REDD+:

"It is not just the takings of land and our trees and our water, our mountains and our grasslands, but it is the takings of our identity. It is the replacement of our Indigenous traditional ceremonies with Christianity, it is taking of our language, it comes with literally the rape of our children, the historical trauma that is documented in Canada in the Church-founded residential schools. This is a serious point."

[15 years of REDD: A mechanism rotten at the core](#)

Leonardo Tello Imaina from Radio Ucamará in Nauta, Loreto, Peru, speaks of the threat of the 'Amazon Waterway' to the Kukuma indigenous peoples. This Waterway is a mega-project aiming to connect the Amazon rivers to capital markets:

"The river, or the 'great serpent,' cannot be seen as a fixed path; it is constantly changing and exchanging with the forest and its many systems of life. [...] The bottom of the river is very important for the spirits that live in the water, such as the 'purawa' (serpent), or the 'karuara'—the people who live in the depths of the river, after having been carried away by the water spirits. Those who have gone to live in the world of water communicate through dreams with their families who live in the earthly world. The pools formed

on the river banks, which enable the water to keep circling, is our ancestors' place of life. In this way, the Kukama have a personal and deep relationship with the rivers."

[Article of the WRM Bulletin 244, 2019](#)

Maria Helena, a member of the Tupinikim indigenous village of Pau-Brasil, in Espírito Santo, Brazil, highlights the impacts of eucalyptus industrial plantations on water and, in particular, on its importance for community relations, especially for women:

"And when there was a river here, the women would grab their bundles of clothes... and it was like a party on the riverbank, all of them washing clothes. It was mostly on Saturdays, and for those who had time, during the week. It was one less chore, because there was all of that water in the river, and everything was easier. [...]The problems got worse when this whole process started, when the eucalyptus came and started sucking all the water from the river until it reached the point that it's reached today."

[Article of WRM Bulletin 128, 2008](#)

Pollution of water also has a devastating impact on communities fighting industrial oil palm and timber plantations in Indonesia. "Mama Na", who is part of the struggle against industrial oil palm plantations in Kampung Subur, Boven Digul regency, Papua, Indonesia, explains:

"The water is polluted. Dead fish are all over the Bian and Digul river. When they came to the area, they built a hospital, the Korindo Hospital. It is literally a "sick house" [in Bahasa Indonesian, Rumah Sakit, means "Sick House"] as the company came to make us sick. The damage sinks underground, to the water. So the fish die. When we use the water for cooking, the pot is oily. Since the company entered, we feel that we have lost our culture. No longer do we have our traditions."

[Article of WRM Bulletin 253, 2021](#)

A woman from the Fulwaripara community in Chattisgarh state in central India, where many communities live with the forests and face threats of eviction due to conservation areas such as tiger reserves, reflects on how community access to water, and with it community life, changed as a result of both climate change and restrictions imposed by a conservation protected area:

"The monsoon season used to be good at that time, lots of rainfall. But now, the dams have come up; they do not allow the water to go to the ocean. As a result, the waves have become less and less, creating less tidal pressure and rains have become less. Through the ocean, the water climbs up and then the rain falls. Along with the rains, lots of fish/crabs and snakes used to appear. We remember playing with snakes which would spread all over the land with the incessant rains [...] Nowadays, we do not even see that much water in the ponds".

[Article of the WRM Bulletin 242, 2019](#)

A woman guardian of the lagoons in Cajamarca, Peru, reflects on the resistance, mainly led by women, against a mining company wanting to take over the community's water and territories:

"At the height of the resistance, we would get up at three o'clock in the morning, we would go around the houses to call people out to the march; later we would fetch donated food from market stalls and shops that supported us. Once the marches were under way we set up communal soup kitchens, no one went without food. Some of us would walk in the front line, singing our marching songs and facing down the repression. We did not mind the weariness, the blows, the frequent railing of our husbands or the incomprehension of our family. We were fighting for water, which is life; for our children, and our

children's children,"

[Article of the WRM Bulletin 211, 2015](#)

This bulletin brings to the fore experiences of communities struggling against the looting of their water. It includes stories from Gabon, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil and Indonesia; stories that highlight how vital and intrinsic water and its community control are to their struggles for land and life.

Quilombola Communities Recover Land and Water After 40 Years of Eucalyptus Monoculture in Brazil

The quilombola communities of Sapê do Norte, Brazil, are living a violent process with the expansion of large-scale eucalyptus monoculture. After many hardships, they started a process to take back their water and land. And the struggle to take back what is theirs continues. WRM talked to two quilombola activists to reflect on this difficult but fertile process of resistance.

The quilombola territory (1) of Sapê do Norte, in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil, occupied an extensive area in the current municipalities of São Mateus and Conceição da Barra. About 12,000 families lived in this area. The remaining families are distributed in 34 communities recognized by the Fundação Cultural Palmares, but with many others still in situations of invisibility without the self-recognition certificate.

These communities were expelled from their traditional territories by a violent process of state-sponsored colonization and then, in the 1970s, with the arrival of the company Aracruz Celulose (later known as Fibria, and currently as Suzano) and the expansion of its large-scale monoculture of eucalyptus. With the state endorsement, and in the name of 'development' they were forced to move to the outskirts of the cities in the region. Others remained surrounded by eucalyptus plantations.

In the midst of daily difficulties, the quilombolas continue to struggle against the various forms of violence they have faced. In 2007 they started a collective process to take back their water, crops and community life. Today it has been 15 years since they managed to take back some of their lands in Sapê do Norte. And the struggle to take back what is theirs continues.

World Rainforest Movement (WRM) talked with **Flávia from the Angelim II community**, a quilombola woman, mother and activist, and **João de Angelim**, also a quilombola activist, agroecologist and quilombola researcher. Their words and their experience in the repossessions leave us many lessons and reflections on the difficult but fertile process of resistance of quilombola communities in the territory of Sapê do Norte.

WRM: How did the history of the repossessions in Sapê do Norte begin?

João: The quilombola communities have been resisting for years. First, with the introduction of eucalyptus in the region, through the struggle for territory, the Law, with studies and technical reports that would guarantee that the community would have back part of its territory that was abruptly taken away. Years passed and we didn't see any chances. We came to the conclusion that it would be necessary to take some steps, to force, to point out some places that would show that

something wrong happened there when the pulp and paper company arrived and took possession of the land.

Then, through the Quilombola Commission, which has representation from each community, together with other social movements that had more experience in land occupation, such as the MST [Landless Workers Movement], the first meetings were held. Then the reoccupations began. The first one was in 2007, in Linharinho, with the purpose of recovering the water, the food, and the soil. Today, this community claims 3,500 hectares of land.

However, it is important to consider the reoccupation in a context of social and environmental reparation that never happened. How many people died because they were expelled from Sapê do Norte? The Brazilian State has to give the land titles to the quilombola communities that are much larger than the lands that are in the process of being taken back. I think that this is the real justice. It won't compensate all these years that have passed, but it will provide an alternative for us here in future. If you have land, you have freedom. Suzano can no longer be allowed to destroy Sapê do Norte, nor any other region.

Flávia: The first reoccupation in the Sapê do Norte territory, in the Linharinho community, was very difficult. It was the first time that we decided and said: "Look, if the state does not hand over, does not return our lands, we are going to start a reoccupation process."

After that we stayed for a while without making new re-occupations.

In the year 2010 there was the reoccupation of São Domingos and Angelim I. More recently we have [reoccupations] in the Angelim basin, Angelim 2, Angelim 3 and Angelim Disa - Angelim is a river that gives name to the communities. Even though the police come, today we manage not to let the armed force come. We are more prepared and we have a network of partners that do their part in supporting us. We are managing not to be criminalized for taking back the communities.

WRM: And how do you organize yourselves before and after the reoccupations?

Flávia: In Sapê do Norte, we have the Quilombola Commission, with representatives from each community. We have monthly meetings. When we are going to do a reoccupation, all this is thought about there, with all the supporting communities. We make a list of supporting entities and all of them are informed, and we always ask for legal advice.

Today, we know about our rights and we are able to have the same dialog as a lawyer. Despite this, when we get to the area, because of the police prejudice it is not acceptable for a Quilombola like me to have this dialog. They always ask for a lawyer. So many times the lawyer is there just to be there, but us Quilombolas, who live and know what our rights are, are the ones who really do the dialogue. Today we have some lawyers that defend us very well, tooth and nail, that have been with us for a long time. They are always with us. We call on movements, councils, and the human rights secretariat - although we don't see much action from the secretariat.

In this way, all the movements get to know that there is going to be a certain action in a certain community, at a certain time, and everyone stays alert. Those who can come, come; those who can't, support us from their places.

And there is also an initial organization at the reoccupation moment. Whoever can, takes seedlings, seeds, whatever they can contribute with, so that we can really occupy the unoccupied space or with eucalyptus. Moreover, we also organize identification boards in the territory to demarcate the space, with process numbers, with articles of the law that gives us the right to the land. The reoccupation is a tense day, of hard work, until the police arrive. Of course, there is no reoccupation without the police. Then the negotiation process begins, which, thank God, we are all winning, and the police leave.

The community that is going to take back the land will be well mobilized and articulated so that there are people there every day, guarding the land, working, so that they don't get there the next day and destroy everything that was done the first day. The reoccupation of Angelim II happened on December 19, 2020.

João: The reoccupation of Linharinho was very quickly repressed. We didn't have a chance to plant. We spent three years thinking about a strategy of how to make a reoccupation last longer and permanent. So, in 2010, the reoccupation happened in two communities: São Domingos and Angelim I, one month later.

The strategy in Angelim I was that we did not stay there. We would go in, plant, and leave. What happened in this first area was that it lasted. There was no police interruption, no isolation of the area, we were able to create ways and manoeuvres through direct dialogue and other resistance strategies. In São Domingos it was the same strategy. We gradually removed the eucalyptus, starting food based agriculture, and more adaptable to the soil situation.

WRM: How did water become so important to your struggle?

João: In one of the investigations carried out by the quilombola movement here in Sapê do Norte in 2002, around 200 streams and wetlands were found to have disappeared in the region. People often did not even have water to drink.

In the reoccupation of Angelim I, we did an action near a flooded area. Then, in 2014 and 2015, we experienced a very dry period. We went back to the area where the flooding was, where there was a reduction in the number of eucalyptus trees, but not enough. People started to remove eucalyptus. From that moment on, the region took on a different shape. The rain came; the soil became more humid and let things happen there.

From there we started keeping an eye on what was happening in the region: where the people were and the springs were regenerated, the water was occupying the points that were dry. One of the clear examples is the Velha Antônia Stream, which had disappeared and we have already managed to recover part of it. This has been gratifying. The bodies of water have been filled with

more water and a significant volume, made by the reoccupied lands, with more than four hundred families in the surroundings removing eucalyptus.

We saw in this small sample how water sprang up, which had not happened for many years. People fishing. In a place where there were no fish, fish started to appear. You start to navigate in a place that had no water. We are talking about one stream, but there are hundreds of streams and rivers impacted here in the region. Imagine how abundant it was before the eucalyptus.

That is, the big problem here is the eucalyptus monoculture, which makes us have no water; the rivers have no water.

The issue of water is immeasurable; we have treated it as the main link between everyone here.

Flávia: In fact, all we had here in the territory was land, water and forest. That was our entire survival. We had no other way to live. So we always say that the forest is our mother and the river is our father. We have always been sustained by them. When I first saw the river, there were still plenty of fish in it, and I managed to get some vines out of the forest, but today our greatest difficulty, in the whole territory of Sapê do Norte, is the lack of water.

Angelim 2 had 105 families, today it has 40. From the moment the companies arrived, they cut down all the forests, and soon after came the planting of eucalyptus. The water and the fish started to diminish and die because of the poisoning. The springs began to dry up.

The monoculture of eucalyptus trees depletes the water of the streams and soon that space is used to plant more eucalyptus trees, getting closer to the source of the water until the spring dries up completely. There is also the issue of dams, which are always built above our communities, leaving the streams below without water. In very dry periods, they roast, they turn into soil. The eucalyptus trees are watered by tanker trucks. They go to the dams, fill the water tankers and water the eucalyptus, the eucalyptus seedlings. That's what they build dams for: to have abundant water all year round.

We don't even have water to drink, it is inhuman. When I attend meetings where the State is represented by the environmental agencies and even by the current government, I usually say that it is shameful to leave more than a thousand families inside a territory without water to drink.

We are in a lot of trouble because of the lack of water. Part of the community is supplied by a tanker sent by the municipality, but they don't see the alternative of cutting back [moving] the eucalyptus trees from the waterholes and reducing the poison (for us to have access to clean water), instead of spending years and years supplying us with tankers.

In the community of Angelim 1, Angelim 2 and Angelim 3, we just need to reoccupy the land and move the eucalyptus trees back. We don't even need to do any spring recovery work, because we can't recover all the springs in such a short period of time. We do recovery work in some strategic springs to advance the process. But just by cutting back [the eucalyptus trees], the water already

starts to sprout. It is unbelievable. Springs that had nothing a year ago, now have water again. This proves that what dries up our springs is eucalyptus, although they say no, that eucalyptus is a plant like any other. Yes, but it is a monoculture. If it had diversity, maybe it wouldn't dry up like it does today

WRM: In this reoccupation process, was the support of movements and organizations in the region and of international allies important?

Flávia: Very important. We always have this vision. When we are alone, the company comes with everything, they are very violent. As they have, as they say, "a name to uphold", they end up perceiving that we are not alone, so they want to keep the dialogue going.

Today, they talk to us in a different way, because they realize that we are not alone. And when they go to the dialogue table, they say that we are the truculents. It is always like this. But the support from the communities and from outside Sapê do Norte is essential. We are in a network maintenance process, with each movement. We need to hold everyone's hand so that we are never alone.

João: The Quilombola struggle already comes as a connected struggle; of denunciations, of partners. The Quilombola struggle of Sapê do Norte is known internationally. The most important thing in the strengthening of this cause were the alliances that we had at a national and international level, even though the reoccupations are self-managed, that have the power to decide what to do, what to plant, what to eat. All this is happening thanks to this block of defence, from human rights, from FASE (Federation of Organs for Social and Educational Assistance) from Espírito Santo, which has always been a partner, from the landless social movements, the MST, in all the networks that it is articulated, the Alert Against the Green Desert Network, the WRM, and many other partner groups in the Latin American networks. We try to articulate ourselves so that we are always feeling each other's pain, aware of what is about to happen in our territories.

They tried to separate us, now we want to become closer, to be near the river and recover the forest that they took away. The relationship was so intimate and so valuable that the places had names and were symbolically respected. Today we talk about forest protection, legal reserve areas, PPAs [Permanent Preservation Areas], but this does not even compare to what the real forests were.

WRM: What were the main challenges in this struggle?

Flávia: As a woman, there are many challenges. A woman is a militant, a mother, a housewife. In my case, I have two children, and it was much more challenging because I had just given birth. My son was four months old when we had to do reoccupation. I am a front-line leader, I depend on the support of the staff. But they only feel confident if I am in the middle of them. I had to be there, so my boy and I were there in all the reoccupations. It is exhausting, we suffer. Not for the community, because the community gives all the support if we have a child, everybody holds her.

We also suffer the prejudice of being a woman, black, Quilombola, farmer, poor. The company usually underestimates us too much. They think that this woman doesn't have the capacity to enter into a negotiation process, so we have to keep proving all the time who this woman is, so that they don't underestimate us or even try to forcefully go against the community. The prejudice is very visible. The day that the pushing happened, I asked them if they could imagine, if it had been him pushing them [Suzano's employees], all white, where he would be now. He would be in jail, for sure. But since it was a white man who pushed a black man, no: they say "I'm sorry" and "let's have a dialogue. Would they have dialogue with us at that moment if it were the other way around? It is always resistance, always watching closely.

Another thing that makes me very worried is the threats. I am always afraid here in the territory. Also because of the human rights movement, all the coordination has a special attention [to me], a question of life. Here there is no phone signal, I only have internet when I am inside the house. If I go out, nobody will know where I am. I always have to be careful not to go out alone, not to go out at night, not to leave my children alone at home. It is very challenging to study, I go out at night to college, and how can I come home if I can't walk at night? It's a whole process that I'm still trying to deal with.

João: The company is always looking for a ruse. At each reoccupation, the company would come up with a project or with programs to divert attention. This happened a lot, this cooling down of the struggle. They ended up co-opting the Quilombolas, the leaders, by employing them, by bringing some programs, saying that they would be better for the community.

What happened with some of the reoccupations was that, as soon as the areas were consolidated, non-quilombola people arrived and, by one means or another, ended up entering. And, many times, because they didn't understand the struggle for territory and the Quilombola struggle, they ended up creating a twisted dialogue and confusing the process. We had a lot of difficulty with this. Recently, in 2020, we suffered a massive invasion attack on the communities' territory by organized non-quilombola groups. It was necessary for us to take a stand, because they had been referring to the localities and using our narrative, as if it were us, and referring to localities as reoccupied areas. A little dangerous. We had to be careful to separate which had been reoccupied with our participation and a little bit of the philosophy of what we think of as a movement. These people ended up leaving.

Maintaining the reoccupations has also been challenging because of the invisibility in public policy. If we are in a condition of self-management, we will have no support from public policy, we will have support from almost nobody. We have been dealing with the farmers, with the quilombolas that are in the field almost as a direct effort from them. And this has been the great differential, it is making it possible to "extract milk from stone", from where it was said that it would not come out. It is possible to have water again where there is no water, to have food where there was no food, to have a forest, to have more animals where there were many.

Another challenge is the eucalyptus' capacity to regrow: it is gigantic. After ten years, we have places that still haven't managed to eliminate the residues. These more than 40 years of abusive

use of heavy machinery, hundreds of kilos of glyphosate, tons thrown into the headwaters, into the waters, have left us in a very bad soil condition. We need to regenerate, to recover [the soil]. In this way, agroforestry has always been part of quilombola life. But in order to regenerate you need to understand the place, to look for the ancestry, what is connected to the environment and what is not. To know what to plant, to know what to let grow.

WRM: What advice would you give to other peoples who are facing a similar process of land or water reoccupation?

Flávia: Here in Brazil, I think that we can't get land if we don't take it back. So, the first thing: you have to take back the land. But, in order to take back land, it is necessary to have a minimum of organization to avoid failing. We need to be connected, to network, even if it is outside the state, outside the country. It is very important to have network support, contact with the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, with the State Defender's Office, with the human rights councils, because these are the State institutions from which we can get some legal support. It is also very important to take care of the lives of our defenders.

And never give up, right? Because if we give up on any process of fighting for rights, one way or another, we are going to die. If we are not defenders, we are going to be shot because we are black, or we are going to die of hunger because we don't have anything to eat, or we are going to die of cold because we don't have a place to live. We have to stay connected and try to stay alive. The priority is life, not giving up, and networking. Support is very important.

João: Don't stop planting, don't stop believing, keep going. In many moments there will be difficulties, but where there is a spring that needs help, one cannot remain in discourse. Action is needed. You can't expect a decision to be made by the judge's pen, because he doesn't feel on his skin how those who are down there are being contaminated.

The reoccupations are a reality today, and just as we were daring to do, we will be daring to keep doing it. This time that has passed has allowed us to reflect and to better understand the situation. It is not easy to understand an isolation of more than 40 years without access to land. And when this possibility opens up, it is normal that crises and confusions come along as well. The reoccupations have taught us this, and I am very grateful that today I have a better understanding of this great plan that worked. And that it is showing that this is the way to go.

I think that the most important thing was to have broken the silence that existed in the midst of the eucalyptus suffocating the communities, which were isolated there. A silence was broken in a place that the community could not enter or cross part of a eucalyptus area to go into a stream without a little fear of surveillance - which they still have, but which had much more control. So, this silence is broken and community relations return.

I see the lands of the peoples of the whole world, of our indigenous brothers, of the tribal communities of each country, that they unite and seek strength together. We have difficult

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moments, but our big enemy are the big projects that come to occupy lands, waters; to kill our people. So, first of all, it is union and local action. Every day, if possible.

(1) Quilombola communities are those formed by descendants of African people who were

Oil Palm Plantations and Water Grabbing: Ivory Coast and Gabon

Industrial palm oil production in West and Central Africa is mainly controlled by five multinational corporations, and could continue expansion. Plantations take up large tracts of land. Land and water are interdependent. Yet, the current water crisis in these territories would not exist if corporations had not grabbed the land from communities.

Industrial palm oil production in West and Central Africa is mainly controlled by five companies: Socfin, Wilmar, Olam, Siat, and Straight KKM (former Feronia). These multinationals control an estimated 67 per cent of the industrial oil palm planted area with foreign investment and may drive continuous expansion. (1) Their established industrial plantations have been linked to numerous impacts on the populations and territories.

The impact on water availability for communities that live in and around industrial oil palm plantations is systematic and dramatic. This is becoming increasingly evident with the many community reports of water scarcity and water pollution.

Industrial plantations often lead to loss of lakes, springs or streams, directly affecting the livelihoods and wellbeing of communities. Drinkable water becomes scarce or inexistent. Besides, the intensive use of chemicals in the plantations and processing plants results in a high pollution of the water sources that remain available, posing a serious health risk for the population, workers and all life that exist in those areas. This also puts at risk local food sovereignty, as water availability for growing crops becomes increasingly challenging as well as fishing and drinkable water for livestock. In consequence, it is often women and girls who are forced to walk longer distances to access drinkable water. This in turn not only heavily increases their workload but also puts them at risk of sexual violence and harassment during the walks.

Palm oil plantations are systematically grabbing from communities and forests. Land and water are interdependent and cannot be separated. The water crisis would not exist if the companies had not taken the communities' land. Their resistance is therefore one: to claim back their territories, with all that belongs to them.

Wilmar's Subsidiary in Ivory Coast: PalmCi

Wilmar International, a multinational company in Asia and Africa and the world's largest palm-oil trader, has a total reported planted area under its oil palm plantation and sugar milling segment in both continents of 232,053 hectares. The company directly owns three palm oil refineries in Africa, along with eight refineries indirectly through its associated companies. In Ivory Coast, Wilmar sources its palm oil through the SIFCA Group, which is 27 per cent owned by and

supported by Wilmar. SIFCA Group in turn runs its oil palm plantation operations in this country under PalmCi, which has 9,361 hectares of planted areas in the department of Aboisso.

Yaproko is a small village located around 50 km from Aboisso. To enter the village, one has to pass a gate controlled by the company's security staff. Passing the gate and driving along the roads inside PalmCi's plantations is the main route to reach the village by car.

In 2020, an article in the WRM Bulletin alerted on the dire situation that the people in Yaproko were experiencing for years regarding access to water. (2) One woman explained at that time that *“the situation we are living in has been going on for decades, and nobody does anything (...) The worst part of all of this is the water that PalmCi provides us with once or twice a week, because it divides the village in order to distribute it. The water arrives in very dirty tanker trucks and is not suitable, as it makes our whole body itch after we bathe. That same tanker truck supplies water to the plantations. (...) When it rains, the whole village rejoices because the women go to collect rainwater that for domestic tasks and other uses. Daily life for villagers in Yapokro is alarming.”*

In 2022, WRM visited Yaproko and talked with some villagers. People said that forests were everywhere in this area until the day that forest officials arrived and cut down all the forest, except for a small portion which was left to the community. Then, Sodepalm (today PalmCi) entered and set up the plantations, encircling Yaproko with plantations. And that is when all the problems and conflicts started.

The villagers explained how they have long been requesting that PalmCi provides clean water as the river is polluted. PalmCi started providing water in tanks, but people generated many skin problems when using the water, in part because the company did not regularly cleaned the tanks. Despite several requests to build a water tower, the community is still waiting. In the discussions during the visit to Yaproko, it became evident that this elemental crisis remains unbearable for the communities.

Besides, women manifested that they are threatened and arrested when they enter the plantations to collect mushrooms and nuts left after the harvest. When a family member visits the community, women cannot give palm nuts as gifts, as visitors risk being arrested and harassed by security guards. This also means that women cannot sell the traditional oil that they produce in the villages or local markets. Women in Yaproko confront structural violence. The water crisis aggravates their dire situation.

Villagers recounted how when government officials arrived to Yaproko, they offered them a glass of water for refreshment; seeing the colour and smelling the odour, they refused, and made all sorts of promises to solve the water crisis. The promises were nonetheless forgotten as soon as these officials left the village.

Olam multinational in Gabon

In Gabon, a public-private partnership between agribusiness multinational Olam, and the Gabonese government began setting up industrial plantations in 2012, on land the company received for free from the government. The activities of the company are linked to deforestation and land conflicts on its palm oil, rubber, and timber concessions. A 2020 report from WRM evidenced how the company hides under false claims of ‘zero-deforestation’ while neglecting the rights of communities.

Villages like Mbadi, Sanga, Mboukou, Rembo, and Mounigou were especially hit hard by OLAM’s large-scale industrial plantations. Despite local resistance, the company expanded its oil palm crops up to 200 meters from villagers’ farms—almost fencing in the villages. This expansion is particularly worrisome given the massive use of hazardous pesticides in the plantations. These chemicals spread to the surrounding community lands, thereby contaminating also the smallholder farms. (3)

Already in 2018, an article in the WRM Bulletin alerted on the severe situation of the water around the village of Sanga. (4) The village’s main water source, located about 50 meters from the houses, is polluted due to the advance of the plantations. In response to villagers’ complains, OLAM built a well near the polluted water source, which is fed by the same contaminated groundwater. People use the water from swamps for various livelihood purposes, including drinking, fishing, and sanitation. The expansion of the plantation has resulted in water streams being filled up with soil to enable the cultivation of oil palms; besides hindering local communities’ access to water basins and lakes. Women have been particularly affected, since fishing, an important traditional activity, was particularly impacted by the company altering the flow of the streams and the pollution.

Villagers affected by Olam’s plantations in Gabon gave their testimony in July 2022 regarding their current situation with water quality and availability. Here are their testimonies:

A villager from Boungounga said: “We have noticed that the water of OVigui river has changed in taste, that it is polluted and that even the fish has changed. The fish don't even last two days; they sleep one night and the next morning they are turned into dough. We are forced to move perhaps as far as 4 km to get to another river. We no longer can live from the OVigui river. We have sent a complaint to the company in regarding this water problem. We are waiting to see if there will be any action because they promised us... but with them, it's always promises. In the meantime, we continue to suffer.”

A member of the Yamba village, said: “Since we have been there, we have been living from our lakes, our forests, the fruits. We were fine; we had no problems. The company made social contracts with the villagers, but until today this has never been respected and we are still waiting. They only make promises. OLAM dried up our lakes, where we used to fish. The company wants to make us believe that they did not dry up our lakes, but we ourselves used to live there and we know all the lakes that existed. Each lake in the Yamba area has a name. There are several lakes that they have dried up. Besides, with the chemical products OLAM uses for their palm trees, the fish can no longer stay in the remaining lakes. It is the same in our rivers. The quantity and quality of the fish we used to have is lost, because the water is polluted.

The day that we go fishing, it's difficult to get the amount of fish we had before. The fish, at the moment, no longer lives in the Yamba river.

Last year, when we went fishing with our big brothers during the holidays I experienced the effects of the chemical products OLAM uses. I sat down on the sandbanks by the river, and 30 minutes later, I felt that my buttocks were tingling a lot so I had to soak myself in water. I tried washing the pants and tights I was wearing, but it didn't work. The next day, I found myself with swollen buttocks. You see, even sitting by the river was a problem. Drinking water is a problem. The water is very dirty, it has another colour. I know that to have good quality water, you have to pass OLAM's plantations. But to cross to the next water source, it's really difficult. So the village is experiencing a slow death... the water is polluted."

A member of the Mandji village said: "The water here at Lake Mangui is not drinkable at all. They pass the water from OVigui river through a motor pump to a reserve, and from the reserve, they put products to be able to whiten the water so that it can be consumed. But it is not drinkable at all. When you wash with this water, it makes you itchy, you get pimples on the skin, there are some who get diarrhea from drinking this water, some children get sick. Those who do not have the means, have to use this water for drinking and cooking. When people can, they use the water in Ouanza or Keyua. But there is no joy here, the water is not drinkable at all."

A resident of OLAM's Madi site, which is in Moutassou, explained: "Truly, all OLAM's sites are facing a water problem. The water we are given, the one that is in our houses, with which we are supposed to wash ourselves, consume and do all the household chores, is not drinkable at all. If you wash with it, without heating it, it gives pimples, itches the body. And women are the most exposed. If someone would come to OLAM's sites to have women examined, in particular with urine tests, the results would be catastrophic, a disaster. A lot of women have infections that they complain about all the time: fungal infections, pain in the lower abdomen, in the pelvis... and where does these all come from? The water.

OLAM never recognizes anything. We are the ones who are the guinea pigs, who suffer, who fall ill with the water they give us. They ask us to go and do in-depth analyses and bring them proof that it is the water that makes us sick. Every time I go for medical exams, there is always an infection. It's really painful. As a result, families are forced to go on the side of Issanga, Badi or even Mouila for having water to consume. But some do not have that choice, do not have the means to go all the time to take water from the neighbouring villages or Mouila. They are obliged to drink this water, unfortunately. And you can easily see many who have scarred skin, filled with pimples, mycosis, scabies...

It is the same situation in the village of Ferra. First, the water pump is damaged because of the continuous pumping of not only the local residents but also of others who come in mass, with lots of containers to get drinkable water, you can imagine. For us to repair it, we have to threaten and shout at everyone... It's really complicated. Ferra is located upstream of the Rimbo River. The examinations made to this river's water confirmed the presence of chemical products, which we did not know before. So the Rimbo River is also polluted, it is no longer drinkable water. The situation of our sacred lake Banfoubou is a disaster! It was polluted since the days of the [oil palm company's] nursery, when the water from the nursery was flowing directly into the lake. We no longer have our sacred lake, most lakes have been dried up, the

swamps have been also dried up. We have almost nothing. The water problem is destroying many rivers... and villages.

Moreover, the pipes passing through the plantations carry the waste from the factory, and it stinks! Nobody can stay there for long, there are too many flies. With the heavy rains, this water will end up in the lower river, which is where we place the motor pump that supplies the whole city of Mali, so there will be yet another water crisis. With that in mind, how will it be in the rainy season? How are we going to protect our skin? What will happen to our children? Our health? We do not feel safe.”

Furthermore, the community of Irongou warned at the beginning of 2022 about the terrible situation they confronted due to the pollution of their water sources, as they “noticed with amazement that for several days the water of the river had turned black with dead fish and had an unpleasant odor”. (5) Therefore, the NGO Muyissi carried out a visit to observe and take samples of the Irongou river’s water in April 2022. The NGO informed OLAM in a letter that the pollution of the waters of the Irongou River is due to “water from a canal leading to a water retention pond at the Olam Palm Gabon factory; as well as [from a] backfill (not recommended by the management plan) of an old pond in Irongou village.” The community used that pond to fish. In addition, the letter states that “the backfilling of the pond by Olam Palm Gabon was carried out after the population noticed the corpses of fish, shrimp (...) Moreover, it was without the knowledge of these populations that this work had been carried out.”

It is crucial to support the resistance of communities confronting oil palm plantations to reclaim their lands – and with these, their water, communities and lives! Resistance has been fertile. Communities’ opposition to the expansion of oil palm plantations is among the reasons that have resulted in companies not expanding as fast as they initially planned. At least 27 projects, covering 1.37 million hectares, failed during negotiations or were abandoned between 2008-2019. (6) One of the reasons for delayed, failed, or dropped expansion plans is community resistance. (7)

The water crisis these communities and others resisting oil palm plantations face would not exist if their lands would not have been taken away from them. Resisting land and water grabbing is one united struggle!

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Peru: Against Oil's Devastation of Territories and Indigenous Rights, The Way of the Rivers

In the northern Peruvian Amazon, indigenous communities affected by contamination from oil exploitation are also prevented from accessing clean water. One hundred communities and their federations have been waging a unified, constant and coordinated fight for eleven years to defend their territories and rivers.

Water is not just water. The importance of water is often reduced to its commercial value and its use as a natural resource—that is, its economic use. This reductionist approach commodifies the different vital uses, relationships and possibilities of water. Furthermore, this approach sees nature as if it were an inexhaustible storehouse; an eternal supply of goods; a machine; an isolated thing that does not have life.

Indigenous Peoples offer us different visions and ways to establish healthier and more interconnected and meaningful relationships with nature and water.

A wise woman of the Awajún people, Irma Tuesta, tells us: “*Our territory is connected to everything, because everything has life for us. Everything has a mother: the water, the air, the forest, the earth, the stones, the hills, the birds, the animals, the plants*” (1). For her, nature is a vital unit, a whole of life formed by various threads of lives. In this case, ‘life’ must be understood not only as a ‘force’ or ‘energy’ in living beings, but also as an ongoing activity, as a journey, as a story, as an experience of living life.

Irma goes on: “*The territory is our life, as is everything that has to do with the territory—our knowledge, our wisdom. We transmit this to our children through stories, poetry and songs, and by protecting our territory.*”

The last words further illuminate this concept. The territory—that is, the rivers and the forest as a whole—is life itself for indigenous peoples. It is the area where their knowledge, their memory and their existence are produced and contained. Their life is their territory. *Apu* (indigenous leader) Alfonso López of the Kukama people, and president of the federation, ACODECOSPAT (which represents 63 Kukama communities from the Marañón, Ucayali and Amazonas river basins in Peru) says: “*The territory is within us; we are the territory. You stop being indigenous when you disconnect from your territory, when you no longer have a relationship with your natural space. You stop feeling indigenous when you stop feeling the power of your nature, the power of the spirits of the plants that feed you, [...] But how can we have a vision if everything is sick? How can we see the future clearly if they are making us sick, if they are destroying us?... and just to seek economic resources*” (2).

The norm does not cover the fullness, but it has substance

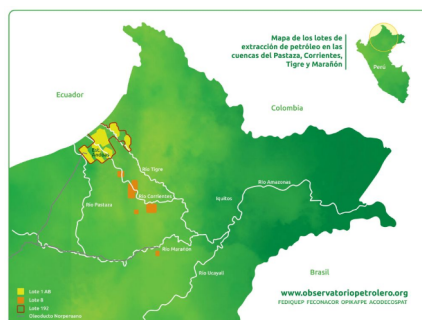
Different multilateral organizations exist to ensure access to water as a human right, and to protect indigenous people's territories. The UN has recognized access to water as a human right since 2010. Meanwhile Convention No. 169 of the ILO—which has constitutional rank in Peru—specifies that States must adopt special measures or establish safeguards to protect and preserve territories that indigenous people inhabit, with the aim of ensuring their cultures, knowledge and productive capacity, among other things. There are also many other references and international jurisprudence on this subject.

Since 2017, the right to access water has been constitutionally recognized in Peru through Law No. 50588. This law only prioritizes human consumption of water over other uses; however, it associates access to water as starting point to access other rights, such as “*dignity, free development of the person, the environment, work, and identity, among other rights*” (3).

But the Peruvian State breaks its own norm, and does very little to reverse the backsliding of this right. According to the Ministry of Culture, 54% of the Amazonian indigenous population does not have access to water via public infrastructure. While this figure seems conservative to us, the ministry's report indicates that this is a big difference compared to the Spanish-speaking population, of which only 11% does not have access to this service (4).

Meanwhile, the Ombudsman Office in Peru published a report in 2018 on the health situation in indigenous Quechua, Achuar, Kichwa and Kukama communities along the Pastaza, Corrientes, Tigre and Marañón rivers, respectively (5). The document says: “*Regarding access to safe water for human consumption, the situation is more extreme. In the districts of Andoas, Pastaza, Urarinas, Trompeteros and Pariniri, between 97% and 99% of homes surveyed consume untreated water. While in the districts of Tigre and Nauta, that figure reaches at least 66% and 82%.*” In its report, the Ombudsman recognizes that this serious situation exposes the population to conditions that increase their risk of developing health problems.

The Ombudsman Office's attention to the aforementioned districts is not arbitrary. These districts are home to rivers and indigenous communities that are affected by oil activity dating back to the early 1970s, in the oil blocks called 192 (formerly 1AB) and 8. They are also affected by the Northern Peruvian Pipeline, which crosses the northern Amazon and Andes mountains, until it reaches a port on the northern coast where the oil is commercialized.



Almost one hundred communities in the affected areas in the Amazon and their indigenous federations—FEDIQUEP, FECONACOR, OPIKAFPE y ACODECOSPAT—have been leading a unified and coordinated fight for eleven years (6). This campaign, coordinated through the PUINAMUDT platform (Amazonian Indigenous Peoples United in Defense of their Territories), has forged a political and technical agenda that has forced the State to take special measures to address the crisis of oil contamination and rights violations in the area.

Despite the fact that some steps have been taken to deal with the problem, the authorities' actions have been insufficient, characterized by uneven implementation and, on many occasions, recurring conflicts. Meanwhile, neither oil activity nor its negative impacts have ceased. These damages accumulate and spread impassively.

Oil Block 192 (in operation since the 1970s) was concessioned to the company, Pluspetrol, from 2000 to 2015, and later to Frontera Energy del Perú S.A., whose contract expired in February 2021. The Block is currently waiting to restart operations. Block 8 (also in operation since the 1970s) has been operated by Pluspetrol since 1996, and the concession runs until 2024. Pluspetrol's main office is officially in the Netherlands. This has allowed the company to avoid taxes on the profits it makes from oil extraction in Peru and elsewhere. Frontera Energy Corporation is a publicly-traded Canadian company with operations in several South American countries.

A vicious cycle: A chain of violations, abuse and damage

A few weeks ago, on June 7, 2022, an oil spill was reported in the indigenous Urarina community of La Petrolera. This community is also located in the Loreto region in the northern Peruvian Amazon, along the banks of the Patoyacu river. The Patoyacu is a tributary of the Chambira river, which in turn is a tributary of the Marañón river. To get there, one must travel by river for at least two days in a high-capacity boat; by canoe (traditional boat), the journey can take three to four days.

Community authorities who reported the discovery could not estimate the amount of oil spilled, but they demanded immediate clean-up actions from Pluspetrol—which operates Block 8, an important oil area in Peru.

Two weeks later, on Sunday June 18, Pluspetrol's lack of timely intervention caused the oil to reach the waters of the Patoyacu river—which is the source of water, fishing and recreation for the community. *“We have been telling them to remove the crude oil for several days, and they haven't done it. We are the ones who notified the authorities of the spill; it is our territory that is being affected,”* the apu of the community, Robles Pisco, told the media (7). Photos shared by the community and circulated in networks also showed fish affected by the spill.

By early July there was still no adequate attention placed on the spill. The community of Urarina continued with its denunciations and claims (8). To date, the community continues to demand that the State declare the area an emergency zone, due to the urgent attention that is required. *“We all have headaches and are vomiting. Workers from the company are also sick—they have said so themselves,”*

said Robles Pisco recently. But the authorities and the company are glaringly silent and absent. The State has only sent delegations to monitor the area.

The tragedy that occurred in the La Petrolera community is not an isolated case. This is not the first time there has been an oil spill in indigenous communities' territories. According to information compiled by the PUINAMUDT platform and the Amazonian Center for Anthropology and Practical Application (CAAAP, by its Spanish acronym), environmental authorities have registered up to 181 oil spills in Block 8 that occurred between 1998 and 2020. Authorities also count more than 670 impacted sites that need environmental remediation. Despite the fact that Pluspetrol halted its operations in 2020, oil spills that damage the territory and the life of communities continue and accumulate (9).

There is a similar case in the forested areas of Block 192, also located in the Loreto region. According to environmental authorities, there are more than 1,119 impacted sites in this Block (10). Between March 2021 and April 2022 alone, 35 oil spills have been reported. The Kichwa community of 12 de Octubre offers a sad example of what is occurring in the area: two oil spills have been reported in their community in 2022 alone. The indigenous communities affected by this Block have denounced this problem before the judicial authority (11).

Thanks to the denunciations in the last ten years by indigenous organizations such as FEDIQUEP, FECONACOR, OPIKAFPE and ACODECOSPAT, the serious environmental and social crisis that indigenous territories in the Peruvian Amazon are experiencing due to oil spills has been made evident. In most cases, these spills affect various water sources that are the source of life for the forests and their indigenous populations.

Zúñiga and León have systematized information about oil spills in the Peruvian Amazon, showing that environmental authorities have recorded up to 474 spills from oil infrastructure between 2000 and 2019 (12). They have also shown that the total amount of oil-produced waters dumped into rivers, soils and wetlands in the northern Peruvian Amazon reached 7.09 billion barrels between 1974 and 2009. These produced waters contained thousands of tons of different highly toxic chemical compounds (13). It is worth noting that the Peruvian State has had official information since at least the early 1980s, when lead was first reported to be found in sediments, water and animals consumed by indigenous Achuar communities in the Corrientes river basin (14).

Navigating the long journey towards justice and reparations

The critical situation in these territories has a long history and is not new to Peruvian authorities. Yet the current government is not taking decisive actions; it is not ensuring effective actions or policies for reparation, nor is it providing necessary guarantees of the rights of indigenous peoples. *“With all of this evidence, we say ‘Enough!’ Enough already. Our own governments are killing us. They are not respecting our rights,”* said *apu* Aurelio Chino Dahua recently—president of FEDIQUEP—at an event in Colombia with the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights (15).

Only after constant social mobilizations, collective denunciations, judicial processes and countless meetings, did the Peruvian state deign to take some actions to address the problem. Faced with the ineffectiveness of different administrations, the communities and their organizations are the ones who proposed the agenda. In 2015, the organizations that formed the PUINAMUDT platform signed agreements proposing concrete actions, budgets and deadlines to address the issues of environment, health, and access to potable water, among other things. The State assumed this agenda by signing a memorandum the same year.

As part of this agenda, studies were carried out that found high levels of contamination in water and soils. In 2016, the Ministry of Health carried out the first toxicological and epidemiological study in the area, which was published in 2019 (16). The study showed that 57% of adults and 49% of children included in the study had levels of lead exceeding the international standard. Additionally, almost one third of the people included in the study had levels of arsenic (28%) and mercury (26%) above the limit allowed in Peru.

A subsequent study in the area, entitled Analysis of the Health Situation (ASIS, by its Spanish acronym) indicates that *“access to public drinking water in communities in the four basins and the Chambira river reveals a critical condition [...] 56% of people reported that they consume river water despite their perception that it is contaminated.”*

So far the State has failed to meet the established agreements—which include those related to water—thereby also failing to meet the obligations it has assumed in international treaties and under the political constitution of Peru.

A forthcoming report by the PUINAMUDT platform explains that when the State has implemented actions related to this commitment (installation of water or sanitation systems in communities, for example), it has done so *“without taking into account indigenous autonomy and institutionality, and ignoring its own guidelines and implementation methods. These indicate the State should take into account the cultural differences and experiences of indigenous peoples, as well as the particular characteristics of the territories”* (17). In some cases, there have been serious cases of corruption in public organizations tasked with project execution, as well as unjustified criminalization of communal authorities.

To date, none of the commitments signed in 2015 have been fully met.

Despite the critical context, indigenous communities and organizations maintain their commitment to defend life, territory and their rights. The fight they have undertaken is against the tide. On July 15, 2022, in a meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, the president of FEDIQUEP denounced the State's negligence in regards to a Health Plan that would attend to more than 500 indigenous communities. President Pedro Castillo's administration has avoided approving this plan for more than seven months.

Such is the poor level of commitment to the rights of Indigenous Peoples by the current, self-proclaimed leftist government. It is clear that its position is the same as previous, openly

neoliberal governments. In this context, organizations and Indigenous Peoples are keeping their spears raised. Such is the constancy and direction of the rivers, which guide the way to defend life in the Peruvian Amazon.

Renato Pita Zilbert,
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July 2022

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Struggling to Stay Afloat: The People of Pari Island, Indonesia, Against Injustice

People in Pari Island are seeing their houses and business more frequently under water. Besides their struggles against corporate-led tourism, four Island's residents are taking legal action against one of the major emitters of carbon dioxide in the world and hence a major responsible for their situation: the Holcim cement corporation.

For many islands and low-lying coastal regions, rising sea levels are one of the most perceptible impacts of climate change. The higher global temperatures rise, the more frequent and extreme the floods become: the connection is direct. Indonesia, where over four million people are exposed to annual flooding, is particularly exposed to rising sea levels due to its long coastline and geographic position. Just how high the water will rise in the future, depends on how high global temperatures will rise. (1)

Pari Island

Pari Island (Pulau Pari) is a two-hour trip by ferry from Indonesia's busy capital city of Jakarta, located in the Thousand Islands regency. The regency is popular with visitors from the capital city, creating economic opportunities for local communities, which, for the rest, are mostly dependent on fishing.

Its popularity moved the Indonesian government to earmark it as one of the “ten new Balis” – Bali being probably the best-known tourism destination in Indonesia. (2) This 10 mega project known as KSPN (*Kawasan Strategis Pariwisata Nasional* - National Tourism Strategic Area), aims to improve access to 10 tourist destinations through initiatives such as building new docks, airports and creating special economic zones to attract foreign investors. Although this might sound like a good plan, in fact, it is mainly targeting the big investors, in detriment to local communities' small businesses.

But that plan is not the only threat that the residents of Pari Island confront.

In 2021, the community in Pari saw its houses and local business under water, not once, but twice. On both occasions, the sea rose higher and higher, and flooded all the houses on Star Beach, in the southwest of the island, and on Virgin Beach, the hub of tourism on the north side.

Although there has always been flooding in Pari, the frequency and intensity have increased noticeably over the past years. Eleven per cent of the island's surface has already disappeared into the sea.

Bobby, a fisherfolk born and raised on the Island, leads a coalition called “Save Pulau Pari” (Save Pari Island). The coalition serves as a space for people to discuss what is happening to them on

their island and advocate for their rights. *“Some years ago, we could still catch much more fish. But the environment has changed a lot in recent years, and yields have declined steadily. Today there are far fewer species of fish than just a few years ago. For a few days after the floods, I could not go out to fish, as I had to help with clearing up the village and cleaning the beaches. I also had to repair my boat. The water had washed it ashore and smashed it against a tree,”* explained Bobby.

The floods have several consequences for the population. People are unable to fish during and immediately after the floods while their houses get severely damaged by the water. Besides, tourism stops, leaving many people who offer guest rooms, food, snorkelling equipment, etc. without income. Also, the wells that provide drinkable water become salty with the floods, forcing people to buy fresh water, which creates another pressure to the income of these families.

Asmania, a local resident from Pari Island lost 300 of the 500 fish that were being reared in aquacultures off the coast during the 2021 floods. She expressed concerns *“about the way the women of the island are being doubly impacted by climate change. Family incomes are falling steadily, yet women must still manage to look after their families.”*

The Struggle for Their Land

Residents of Pari Island have experienced first hand the need to protect their lands and livelihoods from corporate take-overs and profit-making agendas.

In 2015, PT Bumi Pari Asri (BPA) company, a subsidiary of Bumi Raya Utama Group, owned by a conglomerate named Adijanto Priosoetanto, attempted to control over 90 per cent of the island for managing all tourist activities. The other 10 per cent of the Island belongs to the government and is to be used as a research and conservation area. The disputes arose because most of the residents do not have official land titles although some have lived there for generations. Pari Island is one of the few dozen islands which are affected by the rampant privatization for corporate-led tourism. (3)

Since then, several people have been criminalized under the claim of being illegally occupying the land and others were forced to pay rent to the company. (4) Meanwhile, the company has claimed the beach called ‘Pasir Perawan’, which is a key area of the communities’ tourism. In consequence, when residents try to manage the beach, they face intimidation.

In the process of resisting this corporate take over of land, women have taken up a major role standing up to security guards. The community has created a powerful network around them, and found the support of many national organizations and activists under the ‘Save Pulau Pari’ Coalition. (5)

Residents and allies have successfully challenged the process of the corporation gaining land titles and the National Ombudsman declaring that the process involved maladministration. They also successfully challenged the imprisonment of several residents who were eventually released. (6)

The National Land Agency revised the process and the hope is that it re-establishes the legitimate rights of the communities in Pari Island, but the process is still on-going. (7)

Another Injustice in the Hands of Corporations

On top of these on-going struggles, the residents of Pari Island need to confront another injustice that is threatening the very survival of those lands and mangroves they have cared for and protected for generations.

The 1500 inhabitants of Pari Island have not contributed to the climate crisis. Yet, they are suffering the consequences. This is why this crisis is not only an issue of pollution, but it is also an issue of justice. While those most responsible for the pollution and destruction that causes the climate crisis are relatively insulated from its impacts, it is those who have contributed the least that are likely to feel the effects most significantly. Edi, a fisherman and guesthouse owner in Pari Island explains this: *“A handful of people are destroying the environment and are doing so for their own personal benefit. But it is severely impacting other people like us here on Pari Island.”*

The fact is that the brunt of the responsibility for the climate crisis and, thus, for the impacts being felt especially in the global South, lies far away from Pari Island; it rests mainly with the wealthy countries in the North. And with the multinational corporations located there.

That is the reason why Bobby, Arif, Edi and Asmania, all residents of Pari Island, are seeking justice on behalf of the entire Island. They are taking legal action against one of the major emitters of carbon dioxide in the world and hence a major actor responsible for their situation: the Holcim cement corporation. They have filed an application for conciliation in Zug, Switzerland, where the headquarters of the Holcim group is located.

Holcim corporation is the world's leading cement manufacturer and is one of the 50 largest corporate emitters of carbon dioxide worldwide. One study shows that the Swiss corporation emitted more than seven billion tonnes of carbon dioxide between 1950 and 2021. That is more than twice the amount generated by Switzerland as a whole during the same period. (8) Owing to its decades-long and excessive emissions, the corporation bears a substantial share of the responsibility for climate change.

The residents of Pari Island are not being deceived by the greenwashing attempts of Holcim. Its 2022 Climate Report calls for a “net-zero journey”, with claims of “net-zero buildings”, “net-zero concrete”, “carbon neutral products”, “carbon neutral construction”, among many others. (9) All this wording hides the fact that the company will be able to continue to expand (and pollute) as long as elsewhere, some offset projects are claiming to be compensating the pollution. The reality of offsets is far away from the illusion it sells. Offsetting provides a tool for corporations to keep profiting from a capitalist system hooked on fossil fuels, while largely creating devastating local impacts where these projects are being established. (10)

For example, EvopactZERO, “the first carbon-neutral concrete in Switzerland” (11), developed by Holcim, claims to be ‘carbon neutral’ because they argue that the emitted carbon dioxide is compensated by offset projects in Switzerland or India, from South Pole’s portfolio, a carbon finance consulting firm.

This is the first time that a Swiss company is asked to stand up to its legal responsibility for its role in the climate crisis. The case is supported by Swiss Church Aid HEKS/EPER, Indonesian NGO WALHI and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR). Join and support the residents of Pari Island in their struggle against the very real and direct impacts of the climate crisis:

Sign their call to hold Holcim accountable, here: www.callforclimatejustice.org/call

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“Without Water There is No Life”: The Rivers of the Bolivian Amazon

The Beni River in the Bolivian Amazon is under threat. While the government seeks to install mega-dams that would flood an area much larger than the capital, La Paz, mining and its concomitant mercury contamination continue to bring illness to these territories.

Forests contain and sustain innumerable and invaluable riches. Water is an intrinsic and inter-dependent element of forests—it is the basis of all life.

The Beni River crosses the Madidi National Park in Bolivia, one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet, as well as the Pilón Lajas Reserve. It is as if it were “the blood of these lands” (1).

The Bolivian government has been trying to promote mega-dam projects for years in this river basin, particularly the Chepete and Bala projects. The plan is to convert these areas of the Beni River into large lagoons with surface areas of thousands of kilometers. Both reservoirs would flood thousands of kilometers: around 771 km² of direct flooding and around 14,420 km² of indirect influence. As a reference, the surface area of the urban coverage of the capital city of La Paz is 149 km² (2). Both estimates do not consider impacts such as the right of way of roads, or effects for towns that are downstream, such as San Buenaventura or Rurrenabaque. The identification studies carried out estimate that the reservoirs, roads and power transmission lines would deforest more than 100,000 hectares (3).

The creation of these massive lagoons would mean that Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities would have to be evicted, and every living thing left on those lands would be submerged. The water cycle of this territory would change drastically, and therefore life would too. These mega-dams would irrevocably change these communities and the territories they inhabit.

Six Indigenous Peoples live on the lands that they want to submerge: the Mosestenes, Chimanos, Esse-ejjas, Lecos, Tacanas and Uchupiamonas. Five of these are legally recognized by the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation also inhabit these territories. By expelling these peoples from what they call their ‘big house,’ their livelihoods, cultures and knowledge would also be exterminated. These peoples’ most basic rights have been violated, since the companies and authorities have not properly carried out free, prior and informed consultation; nor have they respected existing laws regarding peoples in voluntary isolation. In this way, they are infringing Bolivian regulations and the UN, which require mandatory steps be taken before executing a plan in indigenous territory.

Ruth Alipaz of the National Coordinator for the Defense of Native, Indigenous and Peasant Territories and Protected Areas in Bolivia (CONTIOCAP, by its Spanish acronym), says that “*around five thousand people from indigenous communities would be displaced if these mega-dams were built. This*

is not counting peri-urban populations, such as San Buenaventura, Rurrenabaque and Reyes, as well as populations downriver which would also be affected. Around 150,000 people live in the area of these two dams. The threat is very latent, given that the law which declares these projects to be a priority is still in force. The constant harassment, discrediting and defamation of those of us who are resisting generates distrust. Meanwhile, interested companies and members of the government try to deceive the communities of the basin with promises of work, improvements in their daily lives, and electricity, etc. This is why in July 2022 we invited community leaders from this river basin to visit mega-dams in Brazil, so that they could see the impacts of similar projects with their own eyes.”

It is also undeniable that these huge dams would have impacts not only in the place where they want to build them, but also downstream and upstream. The Beni River flows into the Madera River, which in turn flows into the Amazon river. This whole basin would be affected by this mega-infrastructure.

The Amazonian territories downstream would no longer receive the sediments or nutrients of the Beni River, which are essential for the life of the river. Since the Beni River is the main source of sediment for the Madera River basin, this would affect hundreds of kilometers downstream. This causes soil erosion and a decrease in the availability of groundwater—which directly impacts the production of agricultural products in the communities of these areas.

The dams would also impede the passage of fish and other aquatic species that live in the rivers, and which travel long distances, to reproduce for example.

According to Pablo Villegas, a researcher at the Bolivian Center for Documentation and Information (CEDIB, by its Spanish acronym), *“these mega-dams have been presented to the Bolivian people as a great business. They saw that the price of gas was falling, so they presented this as an economic alternative. But the price of energy in the case of the Chepete/Bala costs more than the price of energy in Brazil—which is the only market they plan to sell to. This is why, when they designed the Chepete/Bala, they installed power lines to Mato Grosso, with more than 1,000 km of cables. Profits for Bolivia do not even seem to be guaranteed. So, what is the interest? Well, it is in the very investment in building these mega-dams. They thought of the money they could move by financing the projected 25 billion dollars...and it is known that dams usually cost twice what is projected. It must be stressed that these mega-projects are contracts for specialized transnational companies. Almost all of the investment is abroad, but the impact is for Bolivia.”*

Using the argument that the dams are in the “national interest,” these mega-projects go against environmental and social laws, destroying lands, rivers and forests. *“Land grabbing is brutal in Bolivia today,”* says Villegas.

These mega-dams are part of a project that includes many dams throughout the Bolivian territory, called the ‘Energy heart of South America.’ In Brazil these mega-dams are called ‘Itaipú expanded,’ because thanks to the Itaipú dam on the Paraná River on the border between Brazil and Paraguay,

Brazil came to have great influence over Paraguay on many levels. This dam was approved during the dictatorship in Paraguay in 1973, and it left Paraguay heavily in debt until 2023 (4).

Feminist activist Elizabeth Peredo says that “everyone is thinking about energy because that is the topic of this civilization.” She also says that in Bolivia “the government’s vision of Buen Vivir [Living Well] has been distorted through the years and has turned into the idea of being a regional power in South America that sells energy.” This vision, she explains, influences the very concept of water, even within Bolivia’s constitutional principles on *Buen Vivir* and the care for Mother Earth.

And of course, to build these mega-dams it would be necessary to create roads. Which means that the territory would not only be degraded and deforested by large swaths; it would also be opened up to big mining and logging companies. That is, it would be opened up to more destruction of forests and rivers that are vital to the people who inhabit them.

And this is critical when one considers that mega-dams are not the only threat to the Beni River basin today.

Mining contamination and other threats

Mining is also destroying this part of the Amazon. Bolivia is one of the countries that imports the most mercury. This metal makes it possible to amalgamate gold found in the rivers. Mercury is very harmful to people’s health because it attacks the central nervous system. Miners use great quantities of it, which impacts all of the life that these rivers sustain—and by extension the people who depend on this water and its diversity for their food. This mining activity, which in most cases is illegal, also brings more violence, prostitution, feminicides, human trafficking and illicit substances, etcetera into the territories.

Ruth Alipaz of CONTIOCAP explains that “*The World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that the mercury limit for the human body is 1 part per million. In the Beni basin, the average is 7-8 parts per million, and the highest ranges are at 27 parts per million for indigenous Esse-Ejjas and in Asunción del Quiquibey. These are very worrisome data. They are killing us. There are reports of constant diarrhea, deformities and disabilities among Esse-Ejja children. They are poisoning the water and food. It is a genocide of the peoples who live in these territories.*”

The many threats to the Beni River are pooling in its currents, but governmental authorities and corporate investors choose to ignore them. The water that is being heavily contaminated by mercury from mining—especially upstream in the Chepete area—is the same water they plan to retain with the mega-dams. So far, there have been no environmental impact studies showing the dangers to human health and to the territories from the high concentration of mercury in the reservoirs (5).

And there is another growing threat to add to this list. This August 2022, the Bolivian government enacted a Supreme Decree to promote oil palm production. Experience from other countries

warns that oil palm production leads to deforestation, scarcity and contamination of water, land grabbing, violence, and many other impacts. This decision has therefore brought a lot of fear to the peoples of the Beni River, since they see that many negative impacts are coming (6).

The Beni River and the Amazon in general—its valleys, forests, peoples—are part of a connected and interdependent whole, in which serious impacts to one part effect the others, often in unexpected ways. This is the reason that water, as the elemental basis of all life, “makes us think that any proposed social change must be systemic,” Peredo concludes.

Julia Blagny,

Director of the documentary “The Blood of Bolivia, from the Andes to the Amazon”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pr8u4lrOW_M

(1) Much of the information in this article, as well as the testimonials, is based on the research for and production of the documentary “The Blood of Bolivia. From the Andes to the Amazon”:

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From Asia to Africa: Tentacles of Oil Palm Plantations are Squeezing Communities Dry

There is no other crop that has grown faster globally in the last decade than palm oil. This almost uncontrollable expansion leaves a deep trail of destruction and conflicts around its giant areas of plantations from Southeast Asia to West and Central Africa. As companies take over more community land, they also grab the water sources from them.

There are no other commodity crops that have grown faster globally in the last decade than palm oil. Vegetable oil production increased 118 per cent in the last ten years alone, the majority of it is driven by the sharp increase in palm oil production. (1) In its epicentre of production, in Indonesia, the area of oil palm plantations is doubling every decade and now has reached more than 15 million hectares. This almost uncontrollable expansion leaves a long trail of destruction and conflicts with it, taking up huge chunks of arable land, pristine rainforests, indigenous forest territories, biodiversity and a limited essential resource that is getting more scarce in the face of the climate crisis: water.

The palm oil industry in Indonesia is a legacy of the colonial era. Since colonialism, Indonesia has been the world's core site of extraction and part of the geography of the global capitalist division of labour. (2) The archipelago has become a supplier of leading commodities in the world market, from minerals to (forced) plantation products. Indonesia has followed and developed the concession capitalism model, which is based on contracts awarded by governments to investors, both for infrastructure projects and for extractive industries' needs. This model has continued in the post-colonial era in order to maintain and facilitate the extractive industries and the expansion of oil palm plantations.

However, as the land for plantations becomes scarce, the palm oil industry needs to expand its business further into other regions. This industry continues to expand its giant areas of plantations to annex and control more people's lands from Southeast Asia to West and Central Africa.

As companies take over community territories, they also grab the water source from them. People who are living inside and around the plantations are struggling to access the quantity and quality of water needed for daily needs: drinking, cooking, bathing, and growing food. Besides, they are also losing important sources of food: the fish in the rivers and lakes that are being contaminated by the agrotoxics used in the plantations.

In this background, communities and civil society organizations from Indonesia, Gabon and Cameroon came together on the World Water Day (22 March) to share their experiences facing industrial oil palm plantations and to assert their rights to water.

Losing access to water: The case in Riau and West Kalimantan, Indonesia

Many Indigenous communities in Indonesia are river-dependent people. Rivers are their lifeblood. It is the source of their livelihood, clean water resources and an important place where ritual or customary ceremonies are held. But now, communities and Indigenous Peoples have to face the loss of the rivers and tributaries that are their source of life.

Expansion of oil palm plantations affects the sustainability of rivers in different ways. Plantations straighten, move, and bury rivers and tributaries with the aim of expediting water flows. These actions increase sedimentation, decline water quality, and accelerate flooding.

Of course, these impacts affect the communities. Sedimentation destroys specific habitats of high value fishes, such as Tapah (freshwater catfish), and declines other fish populations and species. The number of fishing areas is shrinking and this has compelled fisherfolks to travel long distances, which increases their expenses on fuel and others. In the Riau province, which has the largest palm oil plantation concession in Indonesia, the last Pantai Cermin fisherfolks said that they are only able to catch less than 1 kg of fish every two to three days nowadays. Many villagers can no longer depend on their income from fishing and consider it a side job or just a hobby.

Another experience shared by the community from West Kalimantan is that, in the past, they could predict things like, for example, the flood cycles once a year or the big floods every five to ten years. But now, flash floods cannot be predicted and the intensity and frequency of the floods are also increasing. Fisherfolk families such as those from the Semanga or Sambas district, West Kalimantan, used to benefit from the flood seasons because it allowed them to catch more fish, even 20 kg of freshwater giant river prawn per day. But nowadays, after their villages are surrounded by oil palm plantations, they no longer can benefit from the floods. The fish population has decreased tremendously due to the loss of their habitats as well as the declining water quality because of sedimentation and pollution from the plantations. The increase of the floods has also affected most rubber tapper households who lose their income during the floods. The rain-fed rice field along the riverbank has also flooded more frequently, resulting in harvest failure.

Research by Indonesian civil society organisations, People's Coalition for the Right to Water (KRuHA), and, Litoral, confirms this impact. Two villages living in the Riau province, upstream of the Siak watershed, around the plantation of one of WILMAR subsidiary, PT Egasuti Nasakti, found in 2022 that the company is planting oil palms in the riparian buffer zone or next to water bodies. This practice increases fertilizer and pesticide contamination runoff to the river which declines the water quality. The polluted river increases people's dependency on groundwater for clean water needs. But the groundwater quality is also not acceptable as drinking water. This is due to high phosphate concentration from fertilizers, which exceeds the acceptable limit. In addition, more than 87 per cent of groundwater samples exceed hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)). Heavy metals such as lead, chromium, and mercury, which are generally present in fertilizers and pesticides, are well known for causing toxicity to human health and pollute the environment.

“In the past, our livelihood was made up of fishing; most of our people worked as fisherfolks. But a few years after the palm oil came in, our river was polluted. We can no longer catch fish. We also used to drink water from the river, but now it's hard to even take a bath because it's been polluted by the plantations. Once a year, large amounts of waste from plantations and processing factories are dumped into rivers. In the past, there were many tributaries that flowed into the Tapung river, but now many have dried off, buried, or straightened (meaning the dredging or scraping and leveling of the riverbank area so that the company can plant more). Now we only remember the name of the tributary, but its flow is no longer there. We are using wells to meet our water needs, although now we have to deepen them by several tens of meters. The water that we usually get is five or six meters deep. Now we have to drill a minimum of twenty-five meters to get the water.” said Datuk Bathin Sigale, one of the Indigenous elders from Pantai Cermin village in Riau.

Replicating destruction: Stories from Gabon and Cameroon

In the past several years, companies that have caused destruction for decades in Southeast Asian countries, like in Indonesia and Malaysia, have been actively expanding their plantation areas to Western and Central Africa, where oil palm trees originally come from. One such company is OLAM, a Singapore-based food and agri-business company. OLAM Palm Gabon is a joint venture with the Gabonese government and has planted over 60,000 hectares of oil palm plantations in the country.

Ladislav Desire Ndembet from Gabon-based environmental group, Muyissi Environnement, who has dealt with the impact of oil palm plantations in the country, said that they shared a similar situation with communities in Indonesia. In Gabon, companies like OLAM dispossessed lands and contaminated the water of Iroungou river at Moutassou Lot 3. OLAM's goal to establish in Gabon the largest oil palm plantation in Africa comes with a high price for communities.

OLAM is setting up a drip irrigation system for their plantations, for which they take a huge amount of water from the rivers. This certainly affects the water sources of the people living in the vicinity of the plantations. This is a serious challenge in a context of many already great difficulties to access drinking water across the country. People have to dig deep wells to get water. In the area of the village Sanga, Muyissi found that the water was already contaminated by glyphosate, which has been banned in many countries due to its high toxicity. Yet, it is still heavily used in many oil palm plantations, including those from OLAM in Gabon for herbicide control. This heavily affects the health of men and women living around the plantation.

Meanwhile, Emmanuel Elong, president of SYNAPARCAM, a Cameroonian organisation defending the rights of communities, shared how communities living around Socfin/Bollere plantations have to use water contaminated with pesticides and other chemicals for daily consumption. “So many people are getting sick because of this”, affirmed Elong. However, the government does nothing about this problem. Through a vast network of holdings and operational companies, Socfin

controls about 400,000 hectares of land concessions in ten countries, including over 73,000 hectares in Cameroon. Half of that land area is currently covered with industrial plantations.

Most communities in Cameroon do not have access to safe drinking water. Even when the communities affected by Socfin tried to drill a well, water was still hard to come by. The community finally had to wait a week to get water assistance. But these problems have been going on for years. Communities are now also protesting against the RSPO certification awarded to Socfin's subsidiary in Cameroon - Socapalm in Mbongo and Mbambou districts and Safacam in the district of Dizangue. People receive water from Socapalm's tank tractors in uncontrolled frequencies. The company does not comply with various social and environmental criteria established by the certifier itself, yet, they were granted the stamp, which helps the company to access more markets and greenwash its activities.

Connecting the struggles...

Both communities and activists from Indonesia, Gabon, and Cameroon, acknowledged that there is a need to build a stronger and active solidarity among communities against industrial plantations. There is a need to learn from each other and exchange experiences and knowledge at the grassroots level to fight the ever-expanding oil palm plantations.

Facing the same problems and territorial occupation by multinational companies like WILMAR, OLAM, Socfin and others, that have threatened their livelihoods and communities, they understand these companies are in the search to fulfil their unquenchable thirst to profit from palm oil.

The sharing of communities' experiences also shows the importance to connect the fight for land and water in the movement against oil palm expansion. The problem lies in the model of industrial monoculture plantations, which devastates soils, diversity, local livelihoods and water sources.

With land grabbing, there is also water grabbing. The latter is not only about direct water grabbing, but also about the grabbing of basic rights for accessible clean water of communities and plantation workers. The pollution from the high doses of chemical fertilisers and agrotoxins used in industrial plantations is poisoning many water sources and thus, all life that exist in these territories.

GRAIN and KRuHA, Indonesia

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Water, Extractivism and Critical Minerals in Brazil: Some Reflections

The discourse of the 'energy transition' is usually used to justify the expansion of the mineral extractive frontier. However, in addition to local pollution and impacts on forests and people, the extraction and processing of minerals require large quantities of water, with long-lasting and far-reaching effects on territories.

The relationship between mining and water should be seen from the perspective of multiple relationships, among which several are capable of generating socio-environmental conflicts. More than that, as Brazil deepens its extractive profile, there is a strong tendency for such conflicts to deepen. Throughout this text, I argue that a conflicting picture in Brazil involving mining and water use already exists, and that the expansion of mineral extraction to obtain so-called critical minerals has a tendency to deepen such conflicts in the near future.

For the discussion of this issue, I have divided the text into two parts. First, I describe the main impacts that mineral activity has on water resources and highlight how they generate socio-environmental conflicts. Then, I present the main vectors of expansion of extraction of critical minerals in the country and analyze the possible social and environmental effects

Mining, water and conflicts

Water plays a central role in mineral extraction activities. It is of such relevance that it can be said that "[in] many mines much more water is extracted than ore". (1) When an assessment is adopted on a global or national scale, the mining sector is usually seen as a small water consumer. For this reason, scale is one of the main aspects to be considered when studying the relationship between mining and water. Rather than looking at averages or national data, it is important to assess the local or, at most, regional scales, since it is at this level that impacts are perceived and, consequently, where conflicts occur.(2)

The extraction and processing of ores require large amounts of water and are chemical-intensive. As a result, the main implications of mining for water dynamics are the depletion of springs or their contamination.

Regarding water consumption, different activities related to mineral extraction are capable of compromising availability for other users. The main ones consist of consumption by the concentration plants (which separate ores from other substances), transportation by pipelines, impact on the dynamics of aquifer recharge due to ore removal, lowering of underground water to access minerals, and damming of rivers to generate electricity, which will supply the concentration plants.

In addition to these impacts, the pollution potential of mining is also of great relevance. In this sense, the effects have a broad scope from the spatial and temporal point of view, and some of the changes may last for decades or even centuries. (3)

In the qualitative aspect, there are several ways in which mineral extraction can negatively impact water resources. A first source of pollutants is the mining front itself, where the material is excavated, since the drainage systems and the discharge process may transfer contaminated effluents to the water bodies. A second problematic activity is mining inside rivers, which uses dredging of the river bed to later separate ores in low concentration (e.g. gold). A third potential source of contamination is leaching, a process whereby material removed from mining fronts is treated with chemicals (e.g. cyanide) that combine with specific ores and facilitate their separation. This process can generate highly polluting effluents. The piles of sterile (4), should also be mentioned, since in some cases, they may contain toxic substances and their deposition on the surface, with the effect of rain, can generate chemical and physical displacement of the material, contaminating the water. Finally, there is still the problem of tailings dams (5), which are commonly built on river beds and, therefore, generate the risk of contamination in case they contain toxic substances (6).

As a consequence of all these impacts, it is not uncommon for mining companies to come into conflict with other users of water resources. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in socio-environmental conflicts involving water and mining. Between 2011 and 2020, in Brazil, the number of these conflicts increased from 11 to 143 per year. Thus, since 2014, when they overtook hydroelectric plants, mining companies have been the main drivers of conflicts over water. (7)

'Critical minerals' and the expansion of the extractive frontier

The Brazilian economy has a strong extractive profile, and there is the expectation of further expansion of mineral extraction in the country in the coming years. The Brazilian Mining Institute (Ibram) foresees, for the period between 2022 and 2026, investments of around US\$ 40.4 billion. This amount is the second highest figure in an upward curve of investments that began in the five-year period 2017-2021, when the forecast was US\$18 billion.(8)

Part of the planned investments will go, in particular, to the extraction of so-called critical minerals. This term has been used to denote minerals that are used in technology equipment (computers, mobile phones, etc.) and, mainly, in the technological transition to the so-called 'low carbon energy'. (9) In this context, the main uses would be the manufacture of solar and wind power generation systems, the production of batteries for electricity storage, and the construction of electrical transmission networks. (10) The extent to which these energy sources would actually be "clean" is questioned, mainly due to atmospheric emissions and other environmental impacts associated with their supply chain.

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The Map shows all areas in Brazil where there are mines or requests for mineral research related to these minerals. From this data it is possible to verify three main vectors of expansion where future conflicts are likely to be concentrated. In this sense, conflicts over water should play an even more central role.

First, there is an arc that includes northern Minas Gerais, western and northern Bahia, southeastern Piauí, western Pernambuco and southern Ceará. These areas, already occupied by numerous traditional and peasant communities, are characterized by a semi-arid climate, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scenarios point with high confidence to an increase in the duration of droughts in this region, with a risk even of desertification. The local water scarcity tends to become even deeper with the implementation of intensive extractive projects in water resources.

A second highlight on the Map corresponds to northern Goiás and southern Tocantins. This is a Cerrado domain area, which already suffers from high rates of deforestation due to the expansion of agribusiness. The destruction of the Cerrado has had an important influence on the water dynamics of the region with potential developments for the rest of the country, especially for rivers in the Amazon Region, since important rivers such as the Xingu, Tocantins, Araguaia, among others, begin there.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the areas located in the Legal Amazon, such as northern Mato Grosso, southeastern and eastern Pará, eastern Amazonas and northern Roraima. The total area of mining processes in this region adds up to over 238 thousand km², an amount higher than 20 million football fields. The minerals with the largest participation in the extractive projects in the Amazon are copper, aluminum, manganese, nickel and niobium.



Map: Distribution of mining processes for extraction of critical minerals

Source: Adapted from data of ANM, Funai and IBGE

Most likely the implementation and consolidation of these projects will tend to stimulate even more deforestation in the region. Thus, the traditional population will be the most directly affected, not only by the destruction of the means that secure their livelihoods, but also by illness resulting from water contamination.

In a broader perspective, this expansion of the mineral frontier in the Amazon Region will end up creating a paradox. If these projects go ahead, the supply of minerals extracted under the justification of the 'energy transition' will lead to an increase in the deforestation of the Amazon Rainforest, which will intensify climate change, apart from compromising the rainfall regime on a national and continental scale.

In summary, the mineral sector is characterized by a high use of water. Brazil's current mineral model has resulted in an increasing number of conflicts between extractive corporations and local communities, particularly involving access to water.

The discourse of 'energy transition' has been used to justify the expansion of the mineral frontier, without due alteration of the energy model. Thus, the most likely consequences will be an increase in conflicts, intensification of water problems and a deepening of the climate crisis on a regional and global scale. Therefore, questioning the current Brazilian mineral model and the so-called 'energy transition' is imperative to prevent this scenario from becoming a reality.

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- (4) A sterile is a material with varied granulometry, formed mainly by rocks and soil that are removed from the mining front because it does not have enough ore content to be processed. They are deposited in piles inside the mining complex, which can reach tens of meters in height.
- (5) Tailings are residues resulting from the mineral concentration process. They are mainly associated with the wet processing of ores, where they are separated by density. For this to occur, the ores are ground and then mixed with water and chemical products. Because it is denser, the ore gets sedimented; and the other materials together with the water form a muddy compound, which is thrown into the tailings dams. These dams can exceed 100 m in height and contain millions of m³ of tailings.
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RECOMMENDED

Water Justice Roundtables in South Africa

Several South African organizations organized a series of three workshops in South Africa aimed to bring together activists and groups from all parts of the country who were working against the exclusion of poor people from water access, corporate profiteering from water, and unsustainable management of water resources. A report was compiled based on these workshops to share the discussions, proposals and challenges ahead in order to strengthen water justice struggles. Read the report in English here: https://www.fame2022.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/BPP_Water-Justice-Roundtables-Report_-2020-final.pdf

Women and Water Justice Struggles in Africa

A research by the Urgent Action Fund- Africa (UAF-Africa) underlines how it is women who bear the brunt of lack of water and how this has an impact on their health and livelihoods as well as that of their families and wider community. The report calls for a water justice campaign that focuses on strengthening grassroots organising and feminist movement-building across Africa. Read the report in English here: <https://www.fame2022.org/en/womn-water-in-africa-an-overview-of-water-justice-struggles/>

Industrial Agribusinesses are Drying Out African Lands

A recent publication from the organization The Oakland Institute reviews 15 projects from agribusiness in 11 African countries, evidencing how the large loss of land has entailed a dramatic impact on communities' access to water. With access to water already a major challenge for millions of Africans, the expansion of large-scale land deals has a direct impact on livelihoods across the continent. Read the publication in English here:

<https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/drying-out-african-lands.pdf>

Colombian palm oil company under investigation for polluting rivers

An article in the news portal Mongabay exposes how six years after complaints were filed against the company Oro Rojo for polluting the rivers, wetlands and air, with its palm oil mill, nothing has changed. In June 2016, Corporación Autónoma de Santander (CAS), one of the environmental authorities in the north of Colombia, found toxic waste from this palm oil mill into a tributary that flows into the Magdalena River and which feeds the Paredes wetland. Read the article in English here: <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/03/colombian-palm-oil-company-under-investigation-for-polluting-rivers/>

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